PROGRESS ON CHANGES FOR CHILDREN INITIATIVES

A Report from Child and Family Services Standing Committee

October 2007

Metis Child and Family Services Authority

First Nations of Southern Manitoba Child and Family Services Authority

First Nations of Northern Manitoba Child and Family Services Authority

The General Child and Family Services Authority

Manitoba

AT A GLANCE

INTRODUCTION *Page 3*

The Aboriginal Justice Inquiry - Child Welfare Initiative (AJI-CWI) *Page 4*

The External Reviews *Page 5*

Changes for Children *Page 6*

Overseeing the Work *Page 7*

Organizing the Work *Page 8*

THEME 1: Keeping Children Safe Through Primary Prevention Programs *Page 9*

THEME 2: A Priority Emphasis on Early Intervention for Families *Page 10*

THEME 3: Enhanced Support for Front-Line Child Protection Workers *Page 11*

THEME 4: Improved Communication *Page 12*

THEME 5: Strengthen the New Governance Structure *Page 13*

THEME 6: Fiduciary Obligation of the Government of Canada *Page 14*

THEME 7: Section 10 Reviews *Page 15*

"Child welfare in Manitoba is at a turning point. We have the opportunity to make improvements now that will strengthen the commitment to all children and families."

— Strengthen the Commitment, *page 138*

We, the members of Standing Committee, are pleased to provide this report. The members of Standing Committee are:

Lisa Champagne
Chief Executive Officer - Metis Child and Family Services Authority

Rose McKay
Chief Executive Officer - First Nations of Northern Manitoba Child and Family Services Authority

Elsie Flette
Chief Executive Officer - First Nations of Southern Manitoba Child and Family Services Authority

Jay Rodgers
Acting Chief Executive Officer - The General Child and Family Services Authority

Carolyn Loeppky
Acting Director of Child and Family Services

INTRODUCTION

Manitoba's child and family services system plays a crucial role in the province. This is a progress report on work underway to improve it.

The system is responsible for:

- Protecting children who are at risk of abuse or neglect;
- Supporting and strengthening the well-being of families throughout the province, particularly those experiencing difficulty in caring for their children; and
- Providing safe, loving and nurturing care for their children when families can't manage.

These are critical responsibilities. They are also very demanding. Every year, child and family services responds to 60,000 enquires from concerned Manitobans. Every day it supports almost 8,000 families and provides alternative care for over 7,000 children.

It has long been recognized that sweeping changes were needed to improve the system in Manitoba. Reforms were required to address the damage and disruption the system has brought to First Nations and Metis children, families and communities. Major changes were needed in how the system operated and the types of support it could offer children and families.

An important start was made in the 1980s with First Nations child and family services agencies delivering services on-reserve. But, as recommended in the 1991 Aboriginal Justice Inquiry Report, the entire system needed to be reorganized.

It was only in 2000, a decade later, that work began on these recommendations through the Aboriginal Justice Inquiry – Child Welfare Initiative (AJI-CWI). By 2006, historic and unprecedented reforms were well underway. These changes returned the right of First Nations and Metis peoples to develop and control their own child and family services. The changes also established a new governance structure, with culturally-appropriate authorities committed to reforming other parts of the system.

In March 2006, Manitobans were shocked by news of the tragic death of a five-year old child. The three external reviews of the child and family services system that followed, along with two other reviews, identified long standing inadequacies in the child and family services system.

These reviews made 289 recommendations for change. When combined with the reforms already made under the AJI-CWI, the recommendations provide a blueprint to bring about substantial and lasting improvements for the child and family services system.

This report describes progress made within the first year since the October 2006 release of the the external reviews.

Important steps forward have been taken. Much more work lies ahead.

THE ABORIGINAL JUSTICE INQUIRY - CHILD WELFARE INITIATIVE (AJI-CWI)

The Aboriginal Justice Inquiry – Child Welfare Initiative (AJI-CWI) was developed to address the recommendations of the Aboriginal Justice Inquiry. The inquiry was commissioned in 1988 to examine the relationship between Aboriginal peoples in Manitoba and the justice system. The report from the inquiry, released in 1991, documented many serious problems in the child and family services system. The report recommended a major restructuring of the system.

In August 2000, following almost a decade of government inaction on the recommendations, the Province of Manitoba and First Nations and Metis leaders jointly established the Aboriginal Justice Inquiry – Child Welfare Initiative (AJI-CWI). The goals of the AJI-CWI are to:

- Recognize the First Nations and Metis right to control the development and delivery of child and family services to their peoples throughout Manitoba; and
- Restructure the child and family services system through legislation and other changes.

"The AJI-CWI was the most significant change ever made to child welfare in Manitoba and the promise that that change represented needs to be kept."

– Strengthen the Commitment, *page 138*

With the use of a comprehensive planning process that ensured readiness, most of the restructuring was completed by 2006. This has included:

- Establishing a new governance structure featuring four new, culturally-appropriate child and family services Authorities:
  - The Metis Child and Family Services Authority
  - The Northern First Nations Child and Family Services Authority
  - The Southern First Nations Child and Family Services Authority
  - The General Child and Family Services Authority.
- Enacting *The Child and Family Services Authorities Act* and amending *The Child and Family Services Act* and *The Adoption Act.*
- Establishing new service delivery arrangements and partnerships throughout the province.
- Transferring responsibility for more than 3,600 cases, along with human and financial resources, to the Metis and First Nations Authorities and their agencies.

Prior to the external reviews, plans were in place to address the key priorities remaining under the AJI-CWI including new legislation, reviewing residential (group) care, funding models, and implementing prevention programs. *Changes for Children* complements and builds on these plans.

THE EXTERNAL REVIEWS

A total of five external reviews of the child and family services system were recently completed. Three of the reviews were commissioned in response to the tragic death of a five year old child.

- *Strengthen The Commitment – An External Review of the Child Welfare System* (Hardy, Schibler & Hamilton, September 2006)
- *Honouring Their Spirits – The Child Death Review: A Report to the Minister of Family Services and Housing* (Schibler & Newton, Office of the Children's Advocate, September 2006)
- *Recommendations – A Special Case Review (Koster & Schibler, Section 4 Review, September 2006)*

A fourth review, *Strengthening Our Youth – Their Journey to Competence and Independence* (Schibler & McEwan-Morris, Office of the Children's Advocate), was released in November 2006 and focused on services and supports provided to youth who leave the system's care.

The fifth review was released by the Office of the Auditor General (OAG) in December 2006. The OAG review examined the policies and procedures that were in place in the Child and Family Services Division of Manitoba Family Services and Housing prior to the restructuring of the system.

Together, these five reviews represent the most comprehensive set of studies ever done of the child and family services system in Manitoba.

Three key conclusions emerged from the reviews.

- Factors such as poverty, poor housing and addictions, as well as the lack of effective responses to these by other systems, are root causes of family breakdown and the growing demands on the child and family services system.
- The restructuring of the child and family services system through the AJI-CWI was a major step forward and provides both the foundation and the momentum upon which to make other much needed improvements.
- The challenges identified in service delivery predate the restructuring. While not the cause, the restructuring provides a unique opportunity to address these challenges.

CHANGES FOR CHILDREN

"The recommendations offer practical and meaningful solutions to many issues which are cited as long-standing and pervasive within child welfare in Manitoba, as they are within many other jurisdictions."

– Changes for Children: Strengthening the Commitment to Child Welfare, page 5

Work on responding to the recommendations of the external reviews has been organized under an initiative called *Changes for Children.*

Changes for Children was announced on October 13, 2006 by the Leadership Council, comprised of the Minister of Family Services and Housing and First Nations and Metis political leadership. *Changes for Children* provides a comprehensive framework for action on seven major themes from the external reviews:

- Theme 1:
  Keeping Children Safe Through Primary Prevention Programs
- Theme 2:
  A Priority Emphasis on Early Intervention for Families
- Theme 3:
  Enhanced Support for Front-Line Child Protection Workers
- Theme 4:
  Improved Communication
- Theme 5:
  Strengthen the New Governance Structure
- Theme 6:
  Fiduciary Obligation of the Government of Canada
- Theme 7:
  Section 10 Reviews

The Province of Manitoba also announced an initial allocation of $42 million in additional funding, to be put in place over a three year period, to begin addressing the recommendations from the reviews. The Province of Manitoba committed $6.1 million to strengthen Manitoba's foster care system with an emphasis on increased recruitment, training and funding.

OVERSEEING THE WORK

The Minister of Family Services and Housing, in partnership with First Nations and Metis leadership, established an interim structure called the Implementation Team (IT) to oversee initial work on *Changes for Children*. The Implementation Team has been comprised of:

- Two Co-Chairs who are external to the child and family services system
- The CEOs of the four Child and Family Services (CFS) Authorities
- The Director of Child and Family Services
- The Managing Director of the Strategic Initiatives and Program Support Branch

This team has met weekly to set priorities and guide the work on *Changes for Children*. The work of the Implementation Team has been supported by a staff team with representation from each of the CFS Authorities and Family Services and Housing.

Based on current progress the responsibility for the implementation of changes now rests with Standing Committee supported by a newly formed coordination office. The development of the Standing Committee Office is one of the responses to recommendations from the external reviews. The office will further strengthen the governance arrangements of the child and family services system by supporting the work of Standing Committee under the *Changes for Children* initiatives, as well as remaining work on the AJI-CWI and ongoing system management.

These accomplishments have been made possible through the hard work and dedication of many individuals. Special acknowledgement must be given to the two Co-Chairs of the Implementation Team: Dr. Catherine Cook (Regional Director of Aboriginal Health, Winnipeg Regional Health Authority); and Mr. Reg Toews (former CEO of the Eastman Regional Health Authority, and founder of the former Children and Youth Secretariat). Their contributions have been instrumental in the progress made to date.

The release of this progress report marks the completion of the work of the interim structure. Responsibility now rests with Standing Committee, which will be supported by a coordination office in implementation of the recommendations and in undertaking core foundational work.

ORGANIZING THE WORK

The task of implementing 289 recommendations in the complex and recently restructured child and family services system requires careful planning. The Implementation Team began by developing a vision and principles to guide the work on the *Changes for Children* initiative.

Early in the planning process, it was agreed that all work done through *Changes for Children* must be consistent with two foundational principles:

- Demonstrate respect for the spirit, intent and longer term objectives of the Aboriginal Justice Inquiry – Child Welfare Initiative; and
- Demonstrate how the capacity of the child and family services system will be strengthened and ensure that vulnerable children, youth, families and communities who require, or are likely to require, service are the primary beneficiaries.

"The community must be willing to work in collaboration with the child welfare system and families to prevent the victimization of children and youth."

Honouring Their Spirits – Executive Summary

Identification of Priorities for Immediate Action

A number of priority areas were identified for immediate action. Many of these are described in more detail in this report. Other actions taken include:

- Increased basic foster rates by 10% effective January 2007, with an additional 10% increase planned for January 2008.
- Established/mandated, through the Southern First Nations CFS Authority, the Child and Family All Nations Coordinated Response Network (ANCR) agency to operate as the designated intake agency for all child and family services in Winnipeg.
- Established foster care recruitment and placement resource strategies including:
  - Development of 493 new bed spaces for children as of August 2007 through the Circle of Care recruitment campaign, thus exceeding the target of 300.
  - Development and implementation of a new Hotel Use Reduction Strategy that severely restricts the use of hotels as emergency placements. As of August 1, 2007 no children were in hotels.

Building Capacity as We Go

In ongoing developments, Standing Committee will work to implement the recommendations in a series of phases, continually building capacity. The child and family services system has gone through significant systemic change in the last six years and plans being developed will progress carefully, and with consideration of the system as a whole.

KEEPING CHILDREN SAFE THROUGH PRIMARY PREVENTION PROGRAMS

The external reviews called for an expanded emphasis on effective primary prevention programs for all children and families in Manitoba. The reviews stressed that effective prevention programs and resources are a responsibility that the child and family services system shares with families, communities and other service systems.

Overall recommendations from the reviews included:

- Building stronger relationships between service systems.
- Involving community members in designing prevention strategies for their families.
- Reducing the risks to children by better educating communities about situations that threaten child safety.
- Increasing the options available to encourage children, youth and families to engage in healthy behaviours.

Child and Family Services System Response

Acting on Prevention

Now in Place

- Distributed child-friendly suicide prevention materials for use by child and family services agencies.
- Initiated distribution of water safety information to over 3,000 foster parents and care providers.
- Increased the recreational component of basic foster rates.
- Created a central fund for purchase of child safety equipment.
- Launched the Youth Identification Project (YIP) to enable child and family services workers to provide police with identifying information in sexual exploitation investigations.

Scheduled for Fall of 2007

- Consult with provincial experts regarding the design of suicide prevention resources.
- Deliver suicide prevention training for child and family services agency staff.

Scheduled for Winter 2007/Spring 2008

- Expand the successful Stop FASD program to three rural and northern communities.
- Establish the Vision Catcher Fund to enhance support for youth transitioning out of care.
- Implement a mentorship program to provide opportunities for youth leaving care.

Partnering with Other Sectors

Now in Place

- Established an Interim Child Welfare Inter-Sectoral Committee with broad representation to begin working on recommendations related to the need for increased collaboration and integration of systems.

Scheduled for Winter 2007/Spring 2008

- Establish a new resource centre called "Spectrum Connections" to assist young adults and youth with Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD) who are transitioning out of the foster care system into supported or independent living.
- Consult with provincial FASD experts to develop new service standards and identify resources required to assist caregivers to better care for children with FASD, as well as to prevent new cases of children with FASD.
- Introduce new FASD service standards based on best practice models.

Theme 2:

A PRIORITY EMPHASIS ON EARLY INTERVENTION FOR FAMILIES

An emphasis of recommendations from one of the external reviews was the need to increase the child and family services system's capacity to provide early, more intensive and effective supports to families under stress. This approach is referred to as a "differential response" model. It has proven to be very effective in other jurisdictions in better meeting the needs of families and building stronger communities. Through time, it promises to provide a basis for reducing the number of children who come into care.

"Programs need to be developed using community development models to reinforce a child's sense of belonging in a community and the need for families to look after one another."

– Strengthen the Commitment, *page 25*

These recommendations support the understanding, long held by many in the child and family services system, of the priority that needs to be placed on prevention and early intervention. There have been past efforts in the child and family services system to move in this direction but they have been sporadic, limited in scope, and/or not sustainable, given the ongoing and pressing requirement to provide protection services.

Making early intervention a meaningful and lasting priority will require a fundamental shift in how the service system operates. Success, as indicated in the reviews, will require careful planning and a phased approach at the local community, agency and system levels.

Child and Family Services System Response

Acting on Differential Response

Now In Place

- Initiated research on best practice differential response models, including discussions with other jurisdictions about their recent experiences.
- Each Authority conducted promotional/ educational presentations and workshops on differential response with their agencies.

Scheduled for Fall of 2007

- Each Authority, in conjunction with their agencies, develop a plan for differential response.
- Continue research activities on models and related change processes.
- Visit Alberta to discuss the implementation of differential response in First Nations and Metis communities.

Scheduled for 2008

- Implement a number of test sites to demonstrate and evaluate various approaches to differential response.
- Host a major provincial conference on differential response.

By 2008/09

- Develop a conceptual framework for differential response and define a system-wide implementation plan.
- Develop new standards, case management practices, relationships with other community-based services and computer-based case management tools.

ENHANCED SUPPORT FOR FRONT-LINE CHILD PROTECTION WORKERS

The external reviews identified high workload as one of the most significant challenges facing the current child and family services system. Workload has been a long standing issue, in Manitoba and across the country, and contributes to a high occurrence of staff stress and low retention rates. The reviews stated that this must be addressed so staff in the system can follow best practices in their work with children and families.

To address this challenge, focus has been placed on two sets of measures:

- Providing immediate workload relief to CFS agencies; and
- Putting a range of improved and expanded supports in place to assist front-line staff.

Child and Family Services System Response

Providing Workload Relief

Now In Place

- Increased the number of staff positions working in child and family services by 64 full-time positions.

Through to 2008/09

- Provide additional resources for further workload management measures.

Improving and Expanding Supports

Now In Place

- Established a Training Working Group to modify and introduce new elements to the training for child and family services staff. Top priorities include:
  - Orientation/refresher for new/ existing staff
  - Interviewing children
  - Critical incident stress management teams
  - Anti-oppressive and anti-racist principles and practices
  - Suicide prevention.
- Identified and began work on priority improvements to the current child and family services computer information system to increase child safety, reduce workload and improve ease of use and access to information. These include:
  - Streamlining province-wide direct access to case information.
  - Ensuring children with medical risks are clearly identified on the system, and that medical details can be entered.
  - Improving the prior contact check process and the accuracy of results.
  - Building the capacity to display and monitor foster home license expiry dates.
- Issued request for proposals (RFP) to identify a resource to undertake an overall redesign of the current child and family services computer information system.

Scheduled for the Fall 2007

- Implement enhanced province-wide and Authority-specific training programs.
- Establish a user advisory working group to help provide advice on incremental enhancements to, and the redesign of, the child and family services computer information system.
- Engage an external resource to begin initial work on the overall redesign of the child and family services computer information system.
- Continue developing a competency based training manual for foster parents.
- Introduce additional training resources regarding suicide prevention for collaterals and caregivers.

Theme 4:

IMPROVED COMMUNICATION

The fourth theme for change identified by the external reviews is for improved communication throughout the child and family services system. The restructuring of the system through the AJI-CWI was seen to have contributed to a range of new communication challenges. It was recommended that these receive prompt attention.

Child and Family Services System Response

Improving Communication

Now In Place

- Implemented new communication processes to enhance the management of intake of new cases across agencies.
- Established a new consultation process to support the development of child and family services standards that will ensure strong involvement and support across the system.
- Established a cross-Authority communications team, with representation from the Child Protection and Strategic Initiatives and Program Support Branches of Family Services and Housing, to improve communication throughout the system.
- Established a *Changes for Children* website with regular progress reports and other information.
- Provided funding to the CFS Authorities to develop their own websites.
- Provided agencies with funding to buy communication tools for recruiting, training, and community awareness initiatives.
- Developed a joint resolution by the CFS Authorities for establishing ongoing structures to engage both staff and youth to promote improved two-way communication and to secure advice and feedback.
- Consult regularly with key stakeholders such as the Ombudsman, the Office of the Children's Advocate, unions and staff representatives regarding progress on responding to the external review recommendations.

Scheduled for the Fall of 2007

- Establish Authority-specific staff and youth engagement structures.
- Provide Authorities with short-term funding for communications support.
- Organize a first annual provincial child and family services symposium to promote the sharing of information and ideas and provide opportunities for networking as a basis for strengthening the child and family services system.

Theme 5:

STRENGTHEN THE NEW GOVERNANCE STRUCTURE

The fifth theme for change identified by the external reviews is for strengthening the new governance structure.

The external reviews identified that Standing Committee requires better and stronger support to carry out its duties with respect to cross-authority and common system-wide work. Standing Committee is comprised of the CEOs from the four Authorities, and the Director of Child and Family Services. The Standing Committee is an advisory body that is responsible for promoting cooperation and collaboration across the child and family services system and with other systems.

The external reviews also recommended measures to strengthen the capacities of the four CFS Authorities. This is consistent with the reviews' broader intent that there be further devolution of responsibilty to the Authorities.

"Government, the authorities and the agencies need to strengthen and build on their commitment to the relationships, partnerships and collaboration started in the AJI-CWI process."

– Strengthen the Commitment, *page 38* and Executive Summary

Child and Family Services System Response

Building Authority Capacity

Now In place

- Dedicated additional resources to each Authority to support quality assurance functions.

Planned for Winter 2007

- Create 12 new staff positions (eight professional and four administrative) in the Authorities to be assigned to support the work of Standing Committee.

Building Standing Committee Capacity

Now In Place

- Established a staff team representing the four Authorities and the Child and Family Services Division to support the Implementation Team and now Standing Committee in work on *Changes for Children* initiatives and core functions.

Planned for Winter 2007

- Develop and implement a comprehensive plan for the resourcing and operations of the Standing Committee Office. Key areas of focus for the coordination office will include supporting Standing Committee work on core functions including:
  - Overall system management and development
  - Training
  - Communications
  - Information systems development
  - Alternative care
  - AJI-CWI
  - Joint policy/protocols/standards development.

Theme 6:

FIDUCIARY OBLIGATION OF THE GOVERNMENT OF CANADA

"It is important that all governments consider children from a client-focused service model that places the needs of the child ahead of differences in program criteria . . . First Nations communities are especially vulnerable to the inefficiencies and ineffectiveness that arise from jurisdictional discrepancies and poorly coordinated services."

– Changes for Children: Strengthening the Commitment to Child Welfare, *page 15*

Constitutionally, the responsibility for the child and family services system is a provincial one. The Government of Canada, however, is the primary funder of the system on-reserve. The external reviews recommended that federal and provincial funding be 'harmonized' to ensure that a fair and equitable distribution of resources be available to meet the needs of children and family regardless of where they live.

The recent Wen: De[1] report found that federal funding for on-reserve operational support for child and family services cases was as much as 22% less than provincial funding for similar off-reserve cases. To date, no federal funding has been provided to address this gap, nor to address any of the recommendations from the external reviews for the 1,925 children in care on-reserve.

Active efforts, with the full participation and support of First Nations leadership and the Province of Manitoba, are now underway to advance discussions with the Federal Minister and Department of Indian and Northern Affairs Canada to provide for a timely resolution of funding inequities and Jordan's Principle[2] , as well as related policy and jurisdictional matters.

1 "Wen: De - We Are Coming to the Light of Day" First Nations Child and Family Caring Society of Canada, 2005.

2 *Jordan's Principle* refers to a "child first" approach to resolving jurisdictional disputes affecting First Nations children and youth.

Theme 7:

SECTION 10 REVIEWS

Section 10 of *The Fatality Inquiries Act* requires that a review be conducted in the case of the death of a child who has received child and family services in the previous year. The reviews expressed a concern about the system's capacity to fulfill Section 10 requirements and made the following recommendations:

- Increasing staffing and travel resources allocated to Section 10 functions.
- Relocation of responsibility for conducting Section 10 reviews from the Chief Medical Examiner's (CME's) office to the Office of the Children's Advocate (OCA).
- Facilitating independent monitoring of recommendations through assigning an external oversight function to the Office of the Ombudsman.

Child and Family Services System Response

Legislative Changes and Related Protocols

Now in Place

- Developed an interim protocol outlining revised process for conducting Section 10 Reviews pending new legislation.

Scheduled for Fall 2007

- Introduce legislation to transfer the responsibility for the review of child deaths under Section 10 of *The Fatality Inquiries Act* to the Office of the Children's Advocate. The Chief Medical Examiner's Office will retain the responsibility for calling for an inquest.
- Once legislation is passed, increase the resources for conducting Section 10 reviews.

PROGRESS ON CHANGES FOR CHILDREN INITIATIVES

A Report from Child and Family Services Standing Committee

For more information contact:

Changes for Children website:
www.changesforchildren.mb.ca

AJI-CWI website:
www.aji-cwi.mb.ca (now archived)

Standing Committee Office
202-150 Henry Avenue
Winnipeg, Manitoba R3B 0J7
Telephone: (204) 956-5242
E-mail: info@standingcommitteecfs.org

Cette information existe également en français.